

T H E W H I P P E T

a play for television by Pamela Gems

CAST

MARTIN
HELLEN
JIM
PINA
LEONARD
ADRIAN
HERMANN
DOMINIQUE
ARABELLA
PAUL
BILLY
JAKE
JERRY
CHRISTINE
ROGER
BOB
ALBIE, a boy

Pamela Gems,
Ducie Cottage,
Bembridge,
Isle of Wight.
BEM. 2835.

THE WHIPPET.

SCENE 1. A small, semi-circular lecture room. The walls are inspired by modern Japanese screens, with black benches flying up in geometric patterns between; and there is a dais with a table and two chairs with a large metal birdlike sculpture, adjacent. The dais is manned by several television cameras, manned and active.

The setting is unrealistic ... so that the intrusion of the audience, now appearing, seems excessively natural. We are detached from them. The occasion seems to be distinguished. Elderly dons appear in dinner jackets of vintage cut, their wives in velvet. The younger dons are more natty, with silver waistcoats, their wives in fashionable evening costume. The younger lecturers and the students present a motley appearance, ranging from regalia suitable for a Durban to simple guernseys and even blazers; anything goes. As the audience arrives the buzz increases. There is an atmosphere of excitement.

A woman, in her middle twenties, is standing at a bookcase in a large library, making notes in a precariously balanced notebook. She is very comely, with a lot of heavy untidy hair, full-lidded shrewd eyes, and a face of mobility. Her clothes are odd to the point of eccentricity. Nevertheless they set off her beauty extremely well, and have been chosen with great thought. She glances casually at her watch and is stricken. She is late. She thrusts the large tome into place, grabs up her papers from the table behind and flees, gesturing farewell to a woman near the door. She runs away down the corridor.

The lecture theatre is filling fast. One group stands out ... three young men and two girls. They have an intensity and one of the girls, fair-skinned, is dazzlingly pretty. They take their seats.

The woman is running downstairs, her hair flying.

In the theatre the buzz subsides as the lecture party arrives. An elderly man, with a distinguished head, accompanies the speaker, a tall thinnish dark man with a beaky face ... elegant and decisive. People crane for a look ... the speaker is obviously well-known ... a personality.

Tucked away, up at the side, the announcer is announcing the lecturer to the television public.

The woman has now left the library building and is running across an open space. She makes for a wide stepped area and runs up the steps, hurtling herself at the huge, modern heavy door.

The lecture theatre. All is quiet. The chairman has settled his guest, looks at the TV man who cues him, and, getting a nod for his preliminary fill-in, rises.

CHAIRMAN: Ladies and gentlemen ... it is my pleasure tonight to welcome Professor Anscombe who will be lecturing on ... on "Ernest Hemingway ... (he consults his notes) ... the Self-made Myth" ... the third in our Gophrom Lectures for this season. I have a feeling that we are going to enjoy Professor Anscombe in the mood for which he has become celebrated ... ah ... (bending to Anscombe who murmurs something) ... "alas" he says ... justly celebrated ... I am sure we shall all have a very stimulating evening.

Please don't be put off by these strange devices which will move about from time to time. As you may know, this particular lecture in the series is being recorded for reproduction on the television screen. Is that ...? Are we ... right.

He nods and sits, to polite applause. This swells as Martin rises to his feet. He looks about him, tall and handsome and detached. His eyes range the audience, ... he seems to be looking for someone. We know who. He waits for all sound to die away, even longer. We are in the hands of a master. He begins to speak, and, after a few words, we follow his gaze, to the door at the back of the theatre, and then to the doors at each side of the dais, all now closed.

MARTIN: Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen ... (a long pause. He looks about almost in accusation, one hand in his pocket) I want to read you a quotation. It is from a work called "Writers at Work" ... from a recorded, a tape-recorded interview between Ernest Hemingway and a man called (looks down at his notes) George Plimpton. George Plimpton. (There is a murmur of laughter, he has made Plimpton's name seem foolish).

Now, as Martin speaks, we approach the side door.

Outside, in the corridor. Hellen the woman in a hurry, approaches.

MARTIN: (OFF) Hemingway is speaking.
"If you do not mind I do not like talking
about them" ... he means his books ...
(laughter) "and being questioned about
them. It is hard enough to write books
and stories without being asked to
explain them as well. (Titter). Also
it deprives the explainers of work.
(Laughter). If five or six more good
explainers can keep going why should I
interfere with them? Read anything I
write for the pleasure of reading it.
Whatever else you find will be the measure
of what you brought to the reading".
End of quote.

During this last speech Hellen, outside,
has cannoned into a huge man in a
windjacket. Both of them are carrying
books and papers and the lot go flying.

HELLEN: (a cry of anguish) Jim!

JIM: Christ Hellen ... I'm sorry.

They scrabble about, trying to sort their
papers. He is very clumsy, and crushes
her stuff, and she has to rescue it.
They get to their feet and both are
caught by Martin's speech. They pause,
and crane at the door, listening.

MARTIN'S VOICE: ... was a quotation from
a novel which some of you may know called
"Across the River and into the Trees".
It needs no further comment from me. I
would only suggest, in all mildness, that
whatever one were to bring to the reading
of this particular novel ... well perhaps
I might suggest bandages ...

Hellen, about to slip quietly into the
theatre, is arrested by Jim's ferocious
glare. He punches one fist into the other
violently, losing some papers. She picks
them up and follows him to the outer door.

On the terrace outside. Hellen joins Jim. They screw their eyes up against the late spring sunshine. The birds are singing.

He slumps against the wall.

JIM: Crap.

HELLEN: Jim!

JIM: Show me his book!

HELLEN: He's never out of print.

JIM: Yeah. All asspaper. Tell me Hellen, when did that guy make something that wasn't there before he came. Something new.

HELLEN: Oh don't be so mean ... all right ... he hasn't your Marvellous talent ...

JIM: I tell you, he Chooses this occupation ... well ... maybe ... does a vulture choose to be a scavenger ...

HELLEN: Stop it.

He grasps her by the arm so hard that it pinches.

JIM: Listen Hellen, Hemingway was a great writer ... always trying ... that's very frightening you know ... it makes for very bad melancholy because you lose -

HELLEN: Jim you're hurting me!

JIM: I'm sorry so no second-rate, television, suede-tie son of a whore's gonna call him down in my presence -

HELLEN: (Restraining him) Oh Jim, you've been drinking!

JIM: Sure. Why not?

HELLEN: Why do you drink so much?

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She opens the door, anxious to get to the lecture.

JIM: For company.

He blinks up at her. She looks at him with maternal concern. Then something else connects between them. He turns abruptly and makes off down the steps. On the back of his jacket, in large letters, is woven "Alberta: Gateway to the Arctic".

SCENE 3. Martin and Hellen.

MARTIN: (His face in her hair) Mmm. It's so fine.

HELLEN: Too fine.

MARTIN: You should grow it really long. Like this (he pulls her hair down each side of her face).

She kneels before him, supplicating.

HELLEN: Like this?

MARTIN: Yes.

After a slight pause they both speak together.

HELLEN: Martin -

MARTIN: I gather you didn't like my lecture. It doesn't matter ... we can't always adore each other's work.

She turns away. He rubs the back of her neck. But she moves gently away.

HELLEN: Why?

MARTIN: Someone's got to do it.

HELLEN: (Gasps, then) What sort of answer is that?

MARTIN: Hellen ... look here ... Oh, I know people think I do it to make headlines ... all right, it makes headlines, and in a way that's not a bad thing, after all I believe it. I only say what I have to.

HELLEN: I think you do it because you like it.

MARTIN: Like what?

HELLEN: Going for people.

MARTIN: Give me credit.

HELLEN: Is it so difficult to analyse stuff you love, instead of laying about you all the time?

MARTIN: Look, it's not so much a matter of destruction but of clearing the undergrowth. They will read bad stuff, I can't stop them, but at least I can provide the verdicts ... God knows the lazy little bastards won't do it for themselves, too busy screwing and marching about the streets, somebody has to keep the bloody place going. You get the feeling the Goths are at the walls.

HELLEN: You do say some funny things.

He tries to feel her. She is somewhat placated; but not happy.

I've nothing against screwing.

MARTIN: Great. Come for a walk.

She shakes her head.

Why not?

HELLEN: Because when we get to the rhododendrons you'll trip me up.

MARTIN: Is that so terrible?

She looks at him, startled.

Darling if I have to ask! I don't want to marry a bitch lady!

HELLEN: Marry?

It is the first time the word has been spoken between them.

MARTIN: I thought it was understood.

HELLEN: Oh ... Martin ... don't complicate things, we're all right as we are. There's no hurry. After all, I'm hardly unavailable. Am I?

MARTIN: Well, perhaps a little bit.

HELLEN: Oh Martin no ... we're not ungenerous with each other, I'm not ungenerous!

MARTIN: Perhaps not ungenerous.

HELLEN: Tell me.

MARTIN: (Shrugs) ... the other night ... when we were working ... you got up and made yourself a cup of coffee.

She looks at him, puzzled.

You didn't make one for me.

HELLEN: Silly! I was working! I forgot you were there!

MARTIN: Precisely.

HELLEN: But it doesn't mean anything - we can't be connected all the time!

MARTIN: And the night before I left for Sweden you spent the whole evening laughing with that bloody man Boshier.

MARTIN: By the way I don't think it's a good idea for you to be seen about with him.

HELLEN: Oh ... why?

MARTIN: It might be misunderstood.

HELLEN: Because he's on the students' side? So am I!

MARTIN: Bloody show-off ... you can't turn a corner without hearing Jim Bosher's bray ... what's he trying to achieve ... revolution? He's never gone hungry in his life!

HELLEN: It's not about that.

MARTIN: I wish someone would be kind enough to explain to me what is IS about ... they're Spoonfed ... what more do they want?

HELLEN: It isn't a question of "more" ... Bosher says it's a question of less a lot of the time. We're fed up with a world run on the premise of greed ...

MARTIN: Look ... Hellen ... don't quote Bosher at me. When I first knew him he was the shining star of the physics school, then he decides he's a poet, screaming his stuff about the place ... stoned with drugs, I've NO doubt ...

HELLEN: Not at all. He's a vegetarian.

Martin lifts his eyes to the sky. He tries to reason with her.

MARTIN: Darling ... I'm serious ... take a tip from me. Don't put your faith in groups. Ultimately you're on your own ... we all are. Jim Bosher will end up voting Tory like the rest of us.

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HELLEN: (A shocked pause, then) Martin, I don't vote Tory.

MARTIN: Sweetie, you're different.

HELLEN: You mean because I write books? I'm allowed to aberrate ... thanks!

MARTIN: No. Just that you're special. Hellen, whatever you do, it makes no difference. You're ... special.

He kisses her gently and strokes her. She is placated and pleased by his gentleness.

HELLEN: You're wrong about Boshier though. He's good ... he's very good, I smell it on him.

MARTIN: (Murmurs, in her hair) No ... he's a mess ... you women are all fools ...

HELLEN: I asked him why he got so drunk the other night ... he said he was lonely.

MARTIN: Soft-centred, you mean.

HELLEN: No, he's not that. He's kind ... from conviction, you feel it grating in him sometimes ... but he's tough ... oh he's tough.

MARTIN: You're talking a lot about Boshier. What about me ... tell me I'M kind.

HELLEN: But you aren't. Are you?

MARTIN: I want to be.

HELLEN: That's a different matter.

MARTIN: Perhaps you're right. There is something I'd like ...

HELLEN: What?

MARTIN: I should like to make you cry.

They look at each other. Then he kisses her.

SCENE 4. At Pina's. A low-ceilinged Elizabethan room with a few pieces of very modern furniture, and a lot of toys, books, flowers and untidiness. Pina herself is unconventional in shape, indeterminate of age. She is, however, definitive. A good listener, she fixes Hellen from time to time with an intense, objective, tolerant, critical, wholly understanding, conniving, shrewd continental stare. She is cutting out a dress.

HELLEN: (Stretched out on the sofa)
What's it like having a baby?

PINA: (Italian accent) Not bad.

HELLEN: (Unconvinced) Hmmm.

PINA: Soon over. Then you forget.

HELLEN: My sister said it was like being on the rack ... still, she's had two more ... they say there's a new injection you can have.

PINA: Pooch.

HELLEN: All right for you ... you've had yours.

PINA: Yes, in Italy! Well, it is the country for having children! Here, one wear some clever dress and dance and swim ... how clever ... look, no baby at all really ... forget it happen ... breathe deep ... no birth or death, just technical adjustment ... in Italy it is different.

HELLEN: I thought you liked it here.

PINA: I like it. But not for the things of splendour. Here one is so gay and normal ... what is pregnancy? Only one's husband rather put off, and goes to your best friend, waiting so quietly. In Italy ... (she smiles) ... worship. The people touches your clothes for luck. In the street the men salutes you ... "Good fortune on your adventure, madonna!" Besides, a child should be born in the home. He don't lose no weight after birth when he is born in the home.

HELLEN: Isn't it risky?

PINA: Then make it not so. People comes first. Though you would not believe it the way we live. So, you will marry Martin.

HELLEN: He has a marvellous bone structure. We should have beautiful children.

PINA: So?

HELLEN: Say something, Pina. Oh come on ... you've never said a thing about him ... it's unnerving.

PINA: I don't want to say anything.

HELLEN: You don't like him! Nobody Likes him!

PINA: I didn't say that.

HELLEN: Then what do you say? Pina ... you are my friend.

PINA: What do you want me to say? (Pause) He is predictable.

HELLEN: (Quietly) That's a death sentence.

PINA: Marry him. You must marry. I had to.

HELLEN: But you've got marvellous Leonard? How ever did you get Leonard to marry?

PINA: The old way.

HELLEN: You didn't?

PINA: What else? It was a risk, getting pregnant, believe me ... my father is the mayor, and I love my parents. But I must have Leonard. When I meet him I think, ah, there you are.

HELLEN: And you've stayed married ... that's rare enough after ten years.

PINA: It's not too difficult. (She stops cutting). There is only one love which can never be broken ... between the mother and the son. Believe me. So ... when Leonard is hateful in my eyes ... I make him the son. So I forgive him. And since I am his mother as well as his wife, how can he abandon me for some au pair girl? Heh?

HELLEN: Why don't you like Martin?

PINA: I like him very well. He is famous. It will help you. I like him.

HELLEN: No you don't. I can't marry God, you know!

PINA: You could try!

SCENE 5. Sit-in in the cafeteria. The place is full of students, and a lot of activity is going on ... coffee and orange being served ... girls clearing the tables ... talk ... poster painting ... a girl typing ... several people asleep. The special group of students are sitting near an open log fire. Hellen and Martin approach ... Hellen gives Jake, the tall student some papers, they are obviously working on something together.

BOB: (Square-faced student) Hullo
Dr. Anscombe, you for us or against us?

MARTIN: (Sitting) What do you think?
Any coffee? I think you're off your
heads, the lot of you.

JERRY: (Long-haired girl with an intense
humorous face) Dr. Anscombe, you are old!
We shall kick you downstairs!

HELLEN: He doesn't think so. He worries
about you.

CHRISTINE: (The blonde, beautiful one)
Do you?

Jake, tall and thin, blows a raspberry
at her.

MARTIN: From my point of view the best
of you are probably going to get slung out.
... do you think there won't be a backlash
... thanks (someone gives him a coffee ...
look ... tell me something ... honestly ...
how many people here are serious? They'd
be here if it was for the Pope, Irish Home
Rule ... Enoch ... no, not Enoch, Ted
Heath's heather-mixture socks ... it's a
big lark! I've been there! You seem to
forget we've been there!

ROGER: (American) Weren't very
effective, were you? Or did you just
use it as a ladder ... well, it happens!

MARTIN: Gather it may surprise you
deeply to know that some of us get ahead
... yes, I mean that ... earn more money,
respect, freedom of action by hard work
... by putting the hours in.

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There is a sticky silence.

JAKE: Look ... we know there's a lot of rubbish here who just want to lay off work, and get excited ... come to that it is great to lay off work -

ROGER: Because most of the stuff is crap anyway!

MARTIN: A lot of it was never intended as exam fodder for the immature.

HELLEN: Martin - (she wants to get him out of it).

Bosher approaches, distributing leaflets. He is greeted with affection and respect as he makes his way towards the group.

ROGER: A lot of it was written by people under thirty.

MARTIN: And a lot of it wasn't. I'm in a better position to judge than you ... I've been both.

JIM: Hih Hellen.

HELLEN: Jim.

MARTIN: And, believe me ... I certainly would not want to stay in a state of arrested development. What you lot think now you'll have outgrown in a year.

JERRY: There comes a point when that may be a pity ... when last year's thoughts were better ...

MARTIN: But not at the ripe age of nineteen. You don't need it yet, but I can assure you that there is compensation for baldness and piles ... hernia ...

CHRISTINE: I think I'd rather stay ignorant.

MARTIN: I see your point.
(Laughter) Of course we'd all like to remain young and beautiful for ever ... the heresy of today is that the young section themselves off as if indeed they can do just that ... so that at thirty-five, instead of men, you get aging youths with their stomachs sticking out of their jeans and false hair-pieces. No ... I'm for maturity ... it may seem to lack beauty, but believe me, it has a loveliness of its own ... who wants to be arrested in a state of perpetual potential? Sorry, Christine, but the potential is so much ... nothing!

Bosher looms up behind Christine with a proprietary air. She looks up at him, and it is obvious that they have been sleeping together.

JIM: Who's potential?

An enormous burst of laughter.

MARTIN: I concede. I bow to our all conquering cousin from across the water. I was referring to the mind.

JIM: Christine's mind isn't immature. It's a perfectly beautiful mind. (He lifts a chair high in the air over their heads and sits himself in the corner by the fire, adjacent to Martin and across from Hellen. Who watches him and Christine, overcome by physical jealousy.) Are you variant, Christine?

CHRISTINE: I hope not.

JIM: She has all the attributes ... all the attributes!

Hellen looks down in her lap. Bosher leans across to her.

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JIM: (To Hellen) Don't you agree?

HELLEN: I? Yes, I'm sure she has..

He gives her a withering look.

JIM: Hot love and energy, that's what she has ... hot love and energy ... that's not immaturity ... that's normal ... (to Martin) ... normal. Christ, the world could do with some of it.

Christine is embarrassed. There is a snicker of laughter.

MARTIN: (Cool) I agree. The world also needs wisdom and patience and shrewdness and a lot of other qualities associated with ... I was going to say maturity but you seem to dislike the word -

JIM: Only when it's misused ... only when it's misused -

MARTIN: (Cutting him off) I wasn't aware that I - but let it pass. In any case, love and energy aren't the prerogative of the young alone.

JIM: The wastage is almost total.

MARTIN: Evidence?

JIM: Geiger counter. Here.

He taps his chest.

MARTIN: I'm sorry, I -

JIM: Heart.

MARTIN: Oh, we all know about your heart, Boshier.

JIM: Meaning?

MARTIN: Meaning that I think what you're doing here is damned irresponsible.

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JIM: You do?

MARTIN: Yes I do. You're ten long years too old to be identifying yourself with iconoclastic protest, you're not a young brave any more ... the only possible legitimate purpose for your being here is a clinical one ... to observe ... or for charitable purposes.

JIM: Ah, I get it ... you're here playing nurse Anscombe ... you delight me, you play so masculine mostly. It makes me think, I've misjudged you.

MARTIN: I'm here because I care about my students.

JIM: Pig's ass you are. Did you happen to hear let slip that the TV cameras might be here this afternoon ... I haven't seen you down here before these long last days.

MARTIN: The reason I came was to try to persuade my own students, frankly they're all I care about I don't have your global guilt ...

JIM: Who's talking about global guilt for God's sake ... you're the one went round the journals wearing Bobby Kennedy's death like a fur-collared overcoat ... Oh Christ ... (to a student) no, I don't have any more ... eh ... stick around Peter will you ... it's ... (he gestures with his hand, meaning this way, that way).

MARTIN: I simply desire to persuade my own students to confine their demands to cafeteria reform. Ralph Henderson will not ... neither will the Ministry go for all this exploding of the structure ... Somebody has to run a place of this size ... there has to be structure ... the world of photo-chemistry is based upon it. So what do you suggest?

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JAKE: (Tired and patient) Us.

MARTIN: Working on full-time courses?

BOB: You keep telling us about all this energy.

HELLEN: No.

They look at her.

That was Jim.

JAKE: There's a rumour that Henderson's setting up an exploratory committee.

MARTIN: False. I had lunch with him yesterday. I can tell you. This thing will end in impasse and the people who will suffer will be -

A ripple of noise and excitement. People make for the platform. A student grabs the mike.

STUDENT: Will you all shut up please? Shut up, will you? I have ... I have ... I have an announcement to make!

His demeanour commands silence.

STUDENT: The vice-chancellor has agreed to further talks with student representatives. He is of the opinion that extended student representation in the running of the university will be advantageous to us all ...

Prolonged cheering ...

... and he congratulates us on the way that caff is being run here. (Cheering) (He shouts) He particularly likes the coffee! I would like to quote Prof's comments to Gloria here ... "Miss Warden, I commend to you the preservation of the palate ... the rest will follow ..." (Terrific cheering).

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MARTIN: Not only a snake, he wants to be a pet snake.

He goes. Hellen means to follow. But dallies ... and she and Jim leave together. They stroll out into the sun.

JIM: You know he's second-rate, don't you?

HELLEN: Martin? So you keep telling me. She stops, and stares at him.

JIM: I guess he doesn't like my work?

HELLEN: He finds you ... noisy.

JIM: Yeah, I imagine he's pretty refined. Did you know your eyes were yellow?

HELLEN: It's just the sun.

JIM: Yeah ... well ... so long Hellen.

He goes. She watches him, feeling irritated and bereft. For a moment she makes to follow him ... but she can't find a reason. She walks away, frowning.

SCENE 7. Martin and Hellen, embracing. She lifts her head and he looks up at her.

MARTIN: When are you going to marry me? I need you.

HELLEN: Yes I know.

SCENE 8. Pina before her dressing mirror in a vast dressing gown. Leonard is sitting in bed, winding his watch. He is balding, homely, with wisps of hair falling the wrong way and pebble glasses.

PINA: Leonard ... do you think that Hellen should marry Martin Anscombe?

Leonard thinks a long time. Then

LEONARD: No.

PINA: That is what I think. Perhaps I blonde a little in front ... then you don't look down the necks of the students so much.

Leonard watches her with calm pleasure.

LEONARD: I've quite gone off Miss Morrison ... I fancy Miss Evans this term. A short body but beautiful limbs. He's a politician.

PINA: Martin? But you admire him.

LEONARD: Politics is a great profession, perhaps the only profession. Otherwise we should have to rule ourselves, what a terrible thought.

PINA: You are in a religious mood, ah?

LEONARD: It's the spring. They leave off their sweaters ... all those delicious, downy arms ... ah, Pina ...

She gets into bed and he embraces her. She takes off his glasses.

LEONARD: Mmm, I adore you, I bloody can't see.

PINA: You don't need. So you admire him but you think they should not marry.

LEONARD: She would eat him alive.

PINA: Don't let him hear you say that!

LEONARD: Oh, he's a sentimental man ...
he'd like to think of himself dying for love.

SCENE 9. Pina and Hellen, just before a
dinner-party at Pina's.

PINA: ... Leonard thinks you ought to
go away. (She is in a dressing gown).

HELLEN: Oh - why?

PINA: (Vague) He didn't seem to know.
The bell rings. Pina panics.

PINA: (At the window) ... Oh my God, it
is Jim Bosher, what does he want?

HELLEN: (Embarrassed) Pina ... I hope
you didn't mind ... I meant to tell you
... I asked him.

Pina grimaces, grins and flics. Hellen
goes to the door and he follows her in,
looming in the tiny room in a dark suit,
surprisingly beautifully cut. He is very
handsome. He stands over her sternly when
she indicates a seat. Nervously she pours
him a drink.

HELLEN: You look very nice.

JIM: I put on a suit.

HELLEN: Yes ... yes I noticed. (Nervous,
she plays with flowers in a bowl). Pretty
... (He approaches, and she gabbles) Marsh
marigolds ... kingcups ... do you have them
in Canada?

JIM: Yuh, *caltha palustris*. There's a
double variety and a pale thing from the
Himalayas ...

HELLEN: You know a lot about flowers ...
how do you know so much ... well, I suppose
you should ...

He advances on her and corners her,
grabbing her by the wrist.

JIM: I was in a brothel once, in Syria,
the girls were lying on geranium petals.

HELLEN: (Looking up at him, cornered and
vicious) Good ... you must have liked that.

JIM: (Very harsh, struggling for her
mouth as she tries to avoid him) With
pillows stuffed with elder blossom.

He kisses her. It is whoomph, and the room
practically explodes.. She is aghast when
she surfaces at the implication.

HELLEN: Oh God ... all that talk about
flowers ... how could you.

JIM: (Mutters) Come upstairs with me.

HELLEN: No I can't. Jim I can't ...
Pina's dressing, she'll be down any minute.

JIM: What am I going to do?

HELLEN: Oh God, I don't know ... it's
your fault. Look, why don't you go into
Leonard's study ... you could ... oh,
don't just stand there like an orange,
please go away!

He makes to go, taking a bottle of whisky
and a glass in one hand.

HELLEN: Oh Jim, don't drink ... please!

JIM: Hellen, you can't have it all ways.

He goes. Hellen is very restless ... she
looks at herself in the glass and prinks.
Pina rustles in, looking extraordinary.

HELLEN: (Agitated) I put him in the study.
Pina opens the study door, peeps in, and closes it quietly.

PINA: For once, he looks human.

HELLEN: Oh, not you too ... everyone has it in for Jim Bosher!

PINA: Youlllllllike heem?!

Hellen bursts out laughing.

HELLEN: Yes. I llllllike heem!

Pina is thunderstruck. She, who knows all, has been taken unawares.

PINA: Well ... at least, he is not at All predictable!

HELLEN: No. A wildman. Bounded, but infinite!

A little later. Leonard is dispensing drinks to Adrian, tall, thin, distinguished, slightly queer in manner, to Hermann, fattish, darkish, Jewish, about forty-five Dominique, his wife, a magnificent woman with an elaborate hair-style, and to Arabella and Paul, a newly-married couple. He is thin, pale and angular, rather nervy. She is long-nosed and pampered, a Duke's daughter or something like ... the bride of an ambitious young writer of a certain type. Hellen breaks away as Martin arrives, waving a casual greeting to the company.

MARTIN: Darling ...

HELLEN: I'm So glad to see you!

MARTIN: Darling!

He puts his hands on her waist and feels her respond ...

You're lovely this evening!

HELLEN: I'm feeling ... I don't know ...
all over the place!

MARTIN: Splendid!

HELLEN: Don't! Protect me!

MARTIN: What from?

HELLEN: Heavens ... I don't know ... I
feel as if my bones were sprouting buds!

ADRIAN: Well ... you're obviously fertile!
I begin to see what Easter's all about!

HERMANN: There should be more ritual ...
celebration of the spring should be more
joyous ... is it the lack of sun ... where
are your festivals?

ARABELLA: Not much, is it ... choc.
Easter eggs ...

HELLEN: If only one could hop about the
centuries ... Pick ...

PAUL: Mmm, yes ... stuffed-swan breakkers
with the Elizabethans ... a nip up Mount
Olympus before lunch ...

ADRIAN: All those lovely togas ...

ARABELLA: Or in a wimple ... waving from the
tower window ... with a little cheeky plain
underneath and lots of sun, and Provence,
and coming to get me, all clanking ... ooh
... only of course without the smell and
plague and all that sort of thing. I'm
just doing a lovely embroidery with a
whippet hopping about in celandines and
daisies ...

HELLEN: It sounds lovely.

ARABELLA: Yes, I'm rather good at that sort
of thing.

PAUL: She's good at everything.

ADRIAN: Myes ... well, thirteenth century for you, miss ... what about Dominique?

MARTIN: Late renaissance ...

LEONARD: Or early ...

ADRIAN: Yes ... Italian ... netted with pearls ...

PAUL: Intrigue ...

ADRIAN: And a vast poison ring!

DOMINIQUE: Adrian!

ADRIAN: The stone steps to your chamber worn with -

DOMINIQUE: Never mind what with or Hermann will get his yellow face ... what about Pina!

ARABELLA: Oh I see Pina all lumpy in a Regency dress.

PAUL: Managing Prinny ...

LEONARD: Or Edward the seventh ...

HELLEN: Or a Lely ...

PAUL: Yes, a Lely ... shivering at Hampton Court ...

HERMANN: Those eyes ... under a bonnet!

LEONARD: A statesman's wife?

ARABELLA: The power behind the throne! Well, that's what you're all saying ...

ADRIAN: And what about fertile Hellen?

HERMANN: Oh Hellen is Peasants' Revolt.

DOMINIQUE: I wouldn't have minded being Catherine the Great ... she had a marvellous time, after the beginning ... imagine ... ye-es ... who would you be, Hellen?

LEONARD: Yes ... if you could choose?

HELLEN: Me? Oh, I'd be below stairs ... (to Hermann) how did you know? I'd be a cook, in a big house, and I'd smell of cake and gossip, and fall in love with the young lord ...

LEONARD: Aha!

HELLEN: But I'd marry the gamekeeper ...
Burst of laughter ...

NOT because of that ... I'd live in a tiny cottage, with a kitchen range and a hip bath, and lots of children. And I'd know ... everything that mattered.

PINA: What would you know?

HELLEN: I'd know about people, and power, and the grand life. And I ... would be a cook

DOMINIQUE: But why a cook?

HELLEN: Cooks Make things. Bread. I'd be baking bread. And bathing the children. Her face takes on an absent look.

SCENE 12. A Victorian cottage kitchen. The range, shining with blacklead, glows with heat ... a pot, and a kettle nudge for the hob. The round table has a chenille cloth and an oil lamp, another lamp stands on the dresser. In one of the two wooden elbow chairs sleeps a black cat. NELLIE (HELLEN) is bathing a child before the fire. The glow from the fire picks out his wet limbs. All is warm, safe and inviting.

NELLIE: (Rustic voice) Out you come.

She dries him, and puts on his nightshirt.

NELLIE: There you are. Don't forget your prayers ... off you go.

ALBIE: Can I have a bit of bread, Mum?

NELLIE: Oh you ... only if tis done, mind!

She kneels and opens the oven door and slides out the loaf.

ALBIE: Don't it smell good!

NELLIE: Here you are then ... ow!
And don't forget to pray for Granfie's back.

ALBIE: I'm on the inside tonight.

NELLIE: And no quarrelling mind!

He hops off upstairs and she empties the bath. There are squeals from the bedroom.

NELLIE: Albie ... Georgie ... now stop it!

ALBIE: Tis our Winnie!

NELLIE: No tisen't ... tis you teasing ...
now stop it, you'll wake the baby.

She hums a hymn as she lays the table with the new loaf and a heel of an old one, with butter, beer and pickled onions. George, (Jim), her husband, enters in britches and gaiters with a black dog at his heels.

GEORGE: Ah. (A greeting).

NELLIE: There you are.

He goes out to the washhouse to wash. She dishes up his food from the pot.

GEORGE: Was think I got then?

He throws a dead hare on the table. It is dripping with blood.

NELLIE: Oh, Jij, he's a beauty ... he'll hang lovely.

He sits, and eats in silence. She sews under the lamp, rocking.

NELLIE: Winnie's tooth come out this morning ... I give her a hapenny. This is a bigun, Mum, she says. I wants a penny for thisun.

GEORGE: Like her mother.

He finishes and pushes back his chair, and puts out a hand.

Let's have you.

She puts down her sewing, and sits on his lap ... like a little girl ... playing with his hair. She jumps up, gets a comb and begins to comb it ... a ritual ... he turns his head to the comb.

ALBIE: (Off) Mum! (urgent)

NELLIE: Go to sleep!

ALBIE: Mu-um!

His foot on the stairs. They turn, and there is Albert with the chamberpot on his head. Nellie screams and jumps up.

NELLIE: Ooh you little devil you give me such a fright!

GEORGE: What in the -

NELLIE: (Severely) Albic what have you got on your head?

ALBIE: It's the pisspot Mum.

GEORGE: Hey ... hey now.

NELLIE: Albie! It's your mother teaches him words like that, she don't know no better. Well, come here ... let's get it off you.

ALBIE: (As she tugs) Aow ... aow, you're hurting me!

NELLIE: Well stand still! He wriggle like a little elver! Stand still I say!

Albie howls.

NELLIE: Tis no good ... you try Jij ... I can't get un off!

GEORGE: Come here boy.

He tries. Albie moans.

GEORGE: (Irritable in defeat) I can't get the blessed bugger off Nellie, he won't come off for me.

NELLIE: (Wild) Try again!

Shrieks, moans and swearing.

GEORGE: Now doo ee stand still, Albie ... tis no good to keep wriggling ... (a roar) Keep still, boy ... I'll give ee a thick ear in a minute ... what's that?

NELLIE: He says you can't ... the pot's all over is earroles ...

GEORGE: Tis no good ... I can't get it off.

NELLIE: Well what are we going to do then? Take him down the doctor?

GEORGE: Smith more like ...

ALBIE: Mu-um!

NELLIE: You'll have to go, Jij, I can't.

GEORGE: Me?

NELLIE: I can't take him, not with a chamberpot on his head, it wouldn't be decent. You'll have to fetch Smith out of the pub. I'll put his coat and britches on ... where's your boots, Alb?

His mother dresses him, and George takes his hand.

NELLIE: Don't let any one see him, Jij, will you? It's so rude. (An idea) Wait a minute.

She dodges to the dresser, picks up Albie's cap and perches it on the chamber on top of his head.

NELLIE: That's better. Now it don't show so much ... you won't hardly see it in the dark. Keep well into the hedge.

GEORGE: Oh come on.

They go and she rolls up her sleeves and clears the table and stokes the fire. A knock. Surprised, she wipes her hands, takes off her apron, strokes back her hair and goes to the door, alert.

NELLIE: (Pleased surprise) Why ... It's Master Edward!

EDWARD: (MARTIN) Good evening, Nellie, very good to see you. Is George at home?

NELLIE: Won't you step in sir ... he's just gone out. It's very nice to have you home again.

EDWARD: (Entering) Thank you, Nellie. Oh ... how warm it is in here ... how cosy!

NELLIE: Tis home, sir. I doubt George will be very long ... he's ah ... (dimpling) ... having a word with the smith.

He is as enchanted by her as ever.

Come and sit by the fire. I expect you feel the cold after being in such places There.

He protests, but is used to being waited on ... she puts a stool at his feet.

NELLIE: (Squeals) Ooh ... I nearly forgot the other loaf!

She fetches a cloth and takes out the loaf, her face eager and absorbed in the firelight. He smiles, and their glances meet and she presents the loaf for his approval.

EDWARD: By Heaven, that smells good.

But suddenly he begins to shake, and cannot stop. Aghast, she runs for a blanket and tucks it round him.

EDWARD: It's all right Nellie ... it's all right, don't be alarmed ...

She feels his forehead ...

No fever ... it's just a little ... weakness ... it's the war ...

NELLIE: Oh sir. I know. It's very hard to be a man.

He looks up at her piteously ... she has touched a nerve.

NELLIE: I'll get ee a hot drink.

EDWARD: No, don't trouble.

NELLIE: It's no trouble Master Edward ... it's no trouble for me to do anything in the world for you. You know that.

EDWARD: Yes, I do know it, Nellie.

He takes her hand. They remain for a moment, hands held. Then she withdraws, shy.

NELLIE: There, that old kettle won't be long ... I shall get thee a drink.

EDWARD: You're looking ... well. How many children have you, now?

NELLIE: Why four sir, three boys and a girl.

EDWARD: In good health?

NELLIE: Praise God, all of them.

EDWARD: And George?

NELLIE: (Soft) Well.

EDWARD: He's a good man.

NELLIE: Oh yes sir. I've been very lucky.

EDWARD: (Sudden, passionate mutter)
I'd go anywhere with a man like George beside me.

Silence.

So you're contented, Nellie?

NELLIE: As I'm sure you will be sir ... we were all very happy on the estate to hear the news -

EDWARD: Oh?

NELLIE: About the engagement ...

EDWARD: Oh ... oh, yes, of course.

NELLIE: (Polite) Such a lovely young lady.

EDWARD: You've met my fiancée?

NELLIE: Well, I think so, sir ... in church ... was she the tall lady?

EDWARD: (Neutral) Yes, that's right.

She is making the tea. He watches every movement, like a child.

NELLIE: I'll just let her stand a little while. Are you settled?

And she leans over him to adjust the blanket. His face screws up, as if in pain and slowly he reaches up a hand and cups it around her breast. There is an awful pause, then he jerks back, scraping the chair on the stone floor with a frightful noise.

EDWARD: I'm most terribly sorry, Nellie. I completely forgot myself.

NELLIE: (Bright-eyed, like a hen disturbed on the nest) That's all right.

She can't bear it, and opens her arms. She cradles and strokes him, crumpled against her.

NELLIE: There ... there ... there ...

The latch clicks and they spring apart.

ALBIE: It's off, Mum!

NELLIE: Oh Albie ... (embraces him wildly) ... George, it's his Lordship stepped in to see you!

GEORGE: Good evening my Lord.

NELLIE: Say good evening, Albie.

ALBIE: Good evening, sir, your Lordship.

EDWARD: Good evening. Good to see you, George.

NELLIE: You hop on to bed now ... here ...
(she pours hot water into a mug, adds milk
and sugar, for Albie's eager hands) ... and
don't wake the others!

He kisses her fervently and disappears.

GEORGE: (Formal) What can I do for you?

EDWARD: (Very shaky) I ... ah ... it's
rather late now ... perhaps you'd ah ...
come up to the house tomorrow ...

GEORGE: What time, sir?

EDWARD: Say about ten?

GEORGE: Right sir.

EDWARD: Then I must be off. Goodnight
Nellie. (He does not look at her) Ah,
goodnight George. (He slides past him).

NELLIE: Goodnight, sir. (She bobs him
out).

GEORGE: What did he want?

NELLIE: Don't take on, Jij. He's in an
awful way. You were lucky ... it's took
him in the head.

GEORGE: Up to his old tricks, is he?

NELLIE: No, he's not. Tis all been
crushed out of him. Tidn't worth it,
being a lord.

GEORGE: How long was he here?

NELLIE: Ony a minute.

GEORGE: (Suddenly very large and
threatening) Don't you lie to me
Nellie ... what's this tea here?

NELLIE: (Very agitated ... afraid of a hiding for telling lies) He do get shaky ... I sits him by the fire ... that's all.

GEORGE: I'll get my old gun out ... never mind he's the gentry, there's been accidents before.

NELLIE: (Sullen) It's his house ... all this is his.

GEORGE: Not while I pays rent it ain't ... tis mine. If he come again, you talk to un on the step, you mind me?

NELLIE: Yes George.

GEORGE: Come here then. Tidn't all your fault, you're only a woman. (He kisses her crossly). I gotta go back buy the smith a pint of ale.

NELLIE: (A whine of protest) Oh!!

GEORGE: I shan't be long ... and do you behave yourself.

He goes. She reaches for a little fluted cup from the dresser, her cup, and pours herself some tea, hotting it up from the kettle. She sits in the rocker, rocking and sipping, dreamily ... relaxing and hypnotic. The little scratching knock on the door is startling. She turns her head, uncertain. It is repeated. She has heard this knock before. She puts down her cup and goes confidently to the door.

NELLIE: (Her head against the door, in a sing-song) Who is it?

There is a man's hoarse voice. She opens the door a crack to a narrow, sharp, long-nosed gypsy face.

NELLIE: Billy White! Whatever do you want?

BILLY: ... something to show you ...

NELLIE: I bet you have. Go on Billy.

She makes to shut the door, he pushes in.

BILLY: I got some liddle things ere for thee. You said I was to come and see you ...

NELLIE: Not this time of night I never said. I never said that.

BILLY: You have a look what Billy got, lady. I come a long way ... bring you luck.

NELLIE: I knows you, Billy. T'ill be like last time ... that bracelet all come to bits ... "twasn't ony made of wire, my arm was all green. No, you're not coming in ...

But somehow he IS in, dangling a necklace at her.

NELLIE: I don't think much of that. (She has been outwitted, but will not show it) "Tis pinched, I 'low".

BILLY: No. that ain't pinched, lady. Billy don't pinch nothing.

NELLIE: You'll get struck down for lying Billy White, one of these days ...

He proffers bangles, standing over her like a dark priest. His hand, the hand of a trapper, is quite still. Eventually she takes two bangles and stands before the mirror, twisting her arms, admiring herself. She turns

NELLIE: How do you think I look?

BILLY: (With a sudden vulpine look, he has a slight cast) Too pretty for Billy.

NELLIE: You better mind your tongue or, out you go. What else you got?

He holds up a pair of earrings. Her mouth opens ... but he jerks them out of reach.

BILLY: They ain't for sale.

NELLIE: What have you got them for then?

BILLY: (Wolf grin) You give Billy a kiss.

NELLIE: Hah! You go on out of here Billy White ... I'll tell my husband of you!

He twitches the earrings.

I don't want your stuff.

BILLY: (Grins) Like Billy's ... (he twists the sleeper in his ear).

NELLIE: Fancy a man wearing earrings! Well - let's try them on then!

She snatches the earrings and turns to the mirror, puts them on and confronts him.

How much?

Without waiting she turns to admire herself. He closes and puts a hand on her bare arm. She shakes it off at once, gazing at her reflection, shaking the earrings.

BILLY: (Hoarse) Gold.

She is arrested by the word.

BILLY: Real gold.

She looks scorn and disbelief; but regards herself in the glass, swaying slightly so that the earrings catch the light. He begins to stroke her arm again. She shrugs him off lightly, always looking at herself. But the slow movement of his hand, down and down her arm, as if drawing the blood from the heart, seems to drug her. She begins to sway, and turns at last ... lifting her arms with the bangles and dropping them round his neck. She pulls his head down and kisses him. He allows this for a moment and then takes the initiative, ugly, like a savaging fox. She sags against him. Suddenly, without warning he springs away. She topples, fetching up against the dresser. He twitches his fingers for the bangles and obediently she pulls them off. He grabs the necklace from the table, makes for the earrings, and then changes his mind with a malignant smile. He stands for a moment ... then spits on her. And is gone. She sways against the dresser ... her eyes and mouth three big Os. George enters almost at once and she runs to him.

NELLIE: Oh Jij, Jij!

GEORGE: What's the matter?

NELLIE: That Billy White come knocking on the door ... give me the shock of my life!

GEORGE: You never let him in?

NELLIE: Course not ... I'm not that silly ... coming here this time of night, tis all trash ... I wouldn't touch any of his stuff, I wouldn't waste money like that!

GEORGE: I wasn't ony gone five minutes.

NELLIE: Going out and leaving me ... I do get nervous.

GEORGE: You ain't afraid of Billy White, are you?

He takes off his boots, and pats his lap. She approaches, pouting. His face hardens and her eyes widen in fear.

What's that in your ears?

NELLIE: I ... I only tried them on ... I never bought em ...

GEORGE: You said he didn't come in ...

NELLIE: Only on the step ... (faltering).

GEORGE: What did you give him?

NELLIE: I never give him nothing! I wasn't going to buy them ... he heard you coming and run off ... I wasn't going to buy them, honest George ... I wouldn't buy trash like that with your money!

She bursts into frightened tears and stands before him, gulping noisily. His glance is bright and hard.

GEORGE: I shall take my belt to you.

NELLIE: I never done nothing.

GEORGE: You knows what I mean. (Loud) Don't you?

NELLIE: (Pleads) Don't shout at me George!

GEORGE: You knows. So take that idle look off your face.

And he gives her a sudden, horrible clout around the head. She reels and yells.

GEORGE: Just you mind me, my gal. If I catch you at this again it's my belt ... do you understand me?

NELLIE: Yes.

GEORGE: All right then.

He sits. She takes off the earrings and crosses to him tentatively. He looks up and pats his knees. Delicately, she sits on his lap.

NELLIE: Shall I comb your hair?

SCENE 18. Back at Pina's.

DOMINIQUE: I still can't see why a cook ...

HELLEN: Oh, I'd like a life where you could do one small thing well, instead of choosing ... and a Christian life ... where you just had to be a good girl ... where there was progress, not process ...

During this Hellen notices Pina's daughter Cara at the door, in her dressing gown. Cara beckons Hellen, and, as she speaks, she saunters to the door ...

... excuse me ...

and she makes an exit.

SCENE 19. Outside the door.

CARA: It's Dr. Boshier ... he's in the upstairs lavatory and I can't get in.

SCENE 21. Hellen runs upstairs.

HELLEN: Jim, Jim are you all right?

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She pushes.

Jim ... get away from the door.

There is a lot of scraping ... the door gives a bit ...

CARA: I think he's been sick.

HELLEN: Yeah.

She puts her head in.

HELLEN: Oh Jim, get up ...

She helps him out ... he is obviously very drunk, and he has been sick.

HELLEN: You're bleeding ... what were you trying to do?

JIM: I was trying to get out of the window.

CARA: I think I'll use the downstairs one. Honestly.

SCENE 22. In the bathroom. Jim sits on the edge of the bath. She fills the basin.

HELLEN: Take your shirt off ... I'll find one of Leonard's. Jim ... where's your vest ... no wonder you've always got a cold!

HE HUGS HER, SUFFOCATINGLY.

JIM: You're a very nice girl, Hellen.

HELLEN: Not now, Jim. You're all covered in sick.

She cleans him up. He begins to stroke her.

JIM: Sorry ... comes kind of natural. I have a lot of trouble not touching people.

HELLEN: You can touch me. I'm a gusher myself ... have to stop myself down ... people find it too much.

JIM: You get labelled a nut.

HELLEN: Oh, I act a part ... I'm a coward.

JIM: Maybe we Are nuts!

HELLEN: No ... just at the edge of the cluster. It's normal. A little lonely, that's all.

JIM: How come you go about with Anscombe?

HELLEN: Oh lay off.

JIM: Can I go to bed with you?

HELLEN: Do you really want to? Right now?

JIM: Well, no.

She finishes towelling his head.

JIM: You're not going to Marry him, are you?

HELLEN: What's wrong with that? Sometimes I feel I Need a keeper ... I feel so wild ...

JIM: Oh I know ...

HELLEN: Anyway ... I want to be normal ... have children ... there's no-one else who's asked me ... nobody I could tolerate ...

She picks up a large comb and descends on him ...

... except you.

He looks up, jerking his head up at her.

I'd marry you. I think I'll marry you.

JIM: You wanna marry me?

She stands over him ... and begins to comb his hair.

HELLEN: Yes.

JIM: What for?

HELLEN: What do you think? I want to ...

She puts down the comb. And flounders.

... I ... Jim ...

He gets up, and rips Leonard's shirt.

JIM: Gee ... was it a new one?

HELLEN: Oh it doesn't matter.

She picks up the comb. And turns ...

HELLEN: Yes. That's what I want. You.

JIM: It's a pretty crazy idea.

HELLEN: No it's not ... I've got to give up ... for the children ... I'd do it for you ... your work's better than mine ... at least I think it is ... they won't be as handsome of course ...

JIM: It's a pretty esoteric reason.

HELLEN: At least I'm telling you the truth.

JIM: Try a few lies.

HELLEN: Oh Jim!

JIM: You wanna marry me you think I'm some kind of genius ... Christ!

HELLEN: Where are you going?

JIM: To get a drink.

HELLEN: Jim ...

JIM: It's all right. I'll think about it. You'll ... ah ... you'll have to give me time.

HELLEN: Oh! At least put your jacket on!
She throws it after him ... he goes along the corridor and drops out of the window. There is a tinkle.

HELLEN: Please God it's his neck.

HELLEN: I must be mad. I've gone mad.
She goes to the mirror, picks up the comb to tidy her hair.

HELLEN: (Voice over as she looks at herself) He's my husband. I'm not even excited. It just IS.

She puts the comb down. And pulls herself together. She goes to the door, and looks round, picking up a towel.

Spend my life with that ... that ... no ... no ... no!

SCENE 21. The cafeteria; heavy rain outside Hellen, slumped against a wall, is stirring her coffee. About her, things have changed. The plastic tables have been replaced by long tables and benches, and students are still building cubbyholes against the walls. Girls put large bowls of fruit, glass decanters of wine and huge dishes of cheese and French bread on the tables. A girl spreads straw on the floor.

MARTIN: I thought I'd find you here. Have you seen this?

HELLEN: (Glances briefly at the paper) The veto? Yes ... (brief smile) ... I heard about it ...

MARTIN: THEY choose US?

HELLEN: Oh Martin, you exaggerate.

MARTIN: (Sitting) Well I'm getting out. I've got myself fixed up in what is laughably known as the communications industry -

HELLEN: What?! When?

MARTIN: Yesterday. It's ... ah ... television.

He leans across the table.

MARTIN: ... we'll be a damn sight better off Hellen ... (grasps her hand) ... darling ... be in this century will you? We live in a capitalist world ... you'd rather that than be behind bars, because that's where you'd be my sweet, first go!

HELLEN: I don't accept the alternatives.

MARTIN: Hellen, grow up. We all have to face it ... there's a very, very short time, before we're forty-five and on the heap ...

HELLEN: I can't think in those terms ... Martin, look ... I ...

MARTIN: Please darling. Forget all the complications. Just you and me. I'm in hell.

HELLEN: Oh Martin. Oh darling ...

MARTIN: (With a quick look round, he kisses her hand) Marry me. This week ... I'll get a special licence ...

HELLEN: Oh, I'm not sure!

During Martin's next speech Boshier passes outside, in a black mac. Hellen sees him and reacts with great nervousness, watching the door in alarm.

MARTIN: You are ... you are sure ... you need me. It'll be marvellous for your work ... believe me, we'll be a wonderful team ... don't turn me down Hellen ... not now ...

HELLEN: No ... no of course not ...

Boshier swings through the doors.

MARTIN: You mean you will?

Boshier approaches.

HELLEN: What?

Martin, following her gaze, turns.

MARTIN: Oh God. What do you want, Boshier?

CHRISTINE: (Approaching) Do you want some food Jim?

Boshier takes off his Hammer mac and shakes it, spraying water like a dog.

There's spring lamb ... very good ... or Jaya's curried chicken or home made steak and kidney pudding with buttered spinach ...

BOSHER: Yeah ... sounds great ...

CHRISTINE: All right ... I'll choose ...

Boshier sits, makes himself comfortable.

MARTIN: Look, Boshier, whatever it is ... not Now!

JIM: (To Hellen) Can I talk to you?

HELLEN: Not now, Jim.

JIM: Why not? Because of Anscombe?

MARTIN: Look here Boshier -

JIM: It's about last night ...

HELLEN: Jim please!

MARTIN: Why don't you just go away?

JIM: You going to make me?

MARTIN: Yes, you'd love that, wouldn't you ... a punch-up! All part of the heroics.

HELLEN: Stop it. Martin, give me a cigarette ...

His case is empty and she accepts a damp, crooked fag from Boshier's crushed pack. It takes time to ignite, from Martin's lighter.

MARTIN: You should keep your powder dry.

JIM: I don't smoke.

MARTIN: Neither do I. What do you want, Boshier?

JIM: I'm going to marry Hellen.

MARTIN: Oh really. Who says so?

JIM: She does.

Martin smiles at Hellen.

HELLEN: Oh Jim, you are unkind!

There is a gypsy at the door ... a woman, with a large basket of spring posies, primroses and the like. She seems to be pointing out Boshier ...

JIM: I told you I'd think about it.

HELLEN: I must have been mad.

JIM: You did mean it?

HELLEN: I don't know.

JIM: Oh you meant it.

They look at each other soberly.

HELLEN: (At last) Jim I really don't know if I 'meant' it or not. (She shrugs, helpless) I'm in your hands.

JIM: Oh that's much better. (He smiles, a beautiful smile, and jumps to his feet marvellously happy) Hell, I forgot!

He leaps off to the door. Christine arrives with his food.

HELLEN: He'll be back. Christine ... wait ... (she doesn't want to be left alone with Martin) ... we'll ... ah ... join us ... have a drink ... please ...

Christine smiles at Martin and sits beside him. He reacts to her, slightly mollified.

CHRISTINE: (To Martin) I've just heard the latest ... I think it's terrible.

MARTIN: Glad to hear you say so. (He is looking for Boshier)

CHRISTINE: Do you know, they've already got out a rating list for lecturers in the Junior Common room ... it's such a nerve ...

MARTIN: Well I, for one, shall not be enlisting in the beauty competition.

CHRISTINE: But you're at the top of the list ... you've got three times as many votes as any other lecturer!

MARTIN: Really?

She gazes up at him with a long, admiring pale-lashed gaze.

MARTIN: Look Hellen, I'm not in the mood for all this ... let's get out of here ...

HELLEN: I can't.

MARTIN: Why not? That bloody sex maniac's in the mood for trouble and I've other things than Boshor -

HELLEN: Darling ... please. I'm going to marry him.

He stares down at her, aghast, as Boshor, followed by interested students, approaches with the basket of flowers.

JIM: For my love.

He leans over and pushes several flowers into Hellen's bosom. She jerks back, then smiles, and he throws some of the flowers at the girls around, who put them in their hair and bosoms. The sun streams in and someone plays a recorder. Several girls start to dance, joined by one or two small children.

Christine takes Martin's arm, and whispers in his ear. Martin stares at Hellen, who looks at him, tender and upset. But his face hardens.

MARTIN: I've never heard such bloody nonsense in all my life.

He goes, muttering something to Christine, with him, about a decent lunch.

Someone puts a chain of flowers round Jim's neck and a circlet on Hellen's hair. They hold hands as he eats. People kiss, and drink wine and eat. A band plays.

HELLEN: (Suddenly sad) Poor Martin.

JIM: (With his mouth full) Quit patronising the guy.

HELLEN: Me? Nonsense! I just almost married Martin.

JIM: You dislike him. (He eats, unconcerned)

HELLEN: That's a horrible thing to say.

JIM: It's just as well for him I accepted you. Isn't it?

A delicious girl brings him a large slice of lemon meringue pie. Hellen breaks it over his head. He stands up, with a Tarzan yell, which is taken up, and puts Hellen over his shoulder, making for the door.

Somebody yells.

Where are you going?

JIM: Where do you think? To the volcano!

Outside the sun is brilliant. She slides from his arms and lifts up her head and he kisses her briefly. The gypsy woman, with Billy's countenance, is hunched up against the wall, watching them, sour-faced. She has a small tray of trinkets.

GYPSY: I got some pretty earrings, lady. Bring you luck.

Hellen, approaches, drawn. The gypsy dangles the earrings, and Hellen looks at them, mesmerised. She looks at the gypsy, and then at the earrings again.

GYPSY: Cost you a pound, they will. Real gold.

Hellen pauses, her hand goes to her bag. Then she sees, on the tray, a large plastic comb. Her hand flies out and she snatches it up before the gypsy can prevent her.

HELLEN: (Triumphant) I'll have this!

She throws down a large coin and turns to Boshier, the comb in her hand. And kisses him.

JIM: Hey, who's the boss around here?

HELLEN: You are.

They walk away. The gypsy woman watches them go ... the cast in her eye very pronounced. Then, laconically, she spits.

THE END.